7 - Stress Fractures

Figure 1. X-ray showing stress fracture in second metatarsal.

Stress fractures result and develop from cumulative strain on the bone. If you have been unlikely to experience one you know it can be very serious. The most common stress fracture areas for runners include the shin (tibia) feet (metatarsals) or heel (calcaneus).

Are you at risk?

Are you overtraining? Are you tired? Are you pushing the pace? It's not just muscles that need recovery bones need downtime to rebuild after a workout and if you increase the duration, intensity or frequency of your running too soon, your bones can't repair themselves fast enough. Stress fractures are more common in women than men due to nutritional deficits (low oestrogen levels and inadequate calorie intake).

Ironically running (weight-bearing exercise) is protective, and the longer you have been running the better so you will be at lower risk!

Run on it?

No way! You will need to take 8 to 16 weeks off depending on stress fracture location and severity. Bones in the foot repair slower than those in the shin. If you do run on you can end up retiring to the sofa…try aqua running or swimming.

Rehab it

With a stress fracture and the recovery period you have to listen to what your body tells you. Once you can walk without pain especially up and down stairs

you can try some gentle jogging, but back off if there is and lingering pain. It's vital to build mileage up very slowly. Adopt every other day run strategy and ensure you eat the right nutrients that help bone repair.

Studies have shown that hyperbaric oxygen therapy (HBOT) is the medical use of oxygen at a level higher than atmospheric pressure.

Prevention

Improve your bone density with weight training for a period of time. Run on a variety of surface to get a good mix of hard soft and uneven. Ensure you have recovery strategy for every session and every period of training racing. Have your running shoes checked or use a number of pairs while training to limit the impact on any one area.